

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001605

SIPDIS

NEA/ARPI, OES
AMMAN FOR JWHITTLESEY
STATE PASS TO USDA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: TBIO KSCA SENV EAGR ECON PREL BA WHO FAO
SUBJECT: BAHRAIN'S AVIAN INFLUENZA PREPAREDNESS

REF: STATE 195603

11. This an action cable; please see paragraph 10.

SUMMARY

12. (U) Ministry of Public Health Director of Public Health Dr. Sameer Abdulla Khalfan found International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI) meeting summaries (reftel) useful and consistent with the focus of an October 24 emergency GCC meeting on Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) preparedness. Khalfan said the GCC is calling for a regionally-coordinated response. He highlighted a number of steps the GOB is taking to meet the Bird Flu threat. He noted that the Ministry of Agriculture has ordered Bird Flu vaccine for Bahraini poultry and requested any information on the specifications and use of the bird vaccine. The importation of live birds has been banned. Poultry meat must be certified Bird Flu-free. Khalfan acknowledged that these measures would be inadequate to stem the entry of wild birds into Bahrain, which lies in their migratory path. He said the Health Ministry has ordered enough Tamiflu to treat up to a third of Bahrain's population. The GOB has allocated BD 448 thousand (approximately \$1.2 million) to combat Bird Flu and other animal diseases. End Summary.

IPAPI AND GCC MEETINGS REVIEWED

13. (U) Econoff called on Ministry of Public Health Director of Public Health Dr. Sameer Abdulla Khalfan October 30 to discuss reftel summaries of the first meeting of the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI). Khalfan said he found the summaries useful and noted that the focus was consistent with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Health Ministries' concern over Bird Flu.

14. (U) Khalfan said he had attended an emergency GCC meeting in Riyadh October 24 to discuss the most effective precautions against Avian Influenza amid warnings that the virus poses a threat to the Gulf region. He said the GCC has called for a regionally-coordinated response to the Bird Flu threat and that Bahrain is readying a robust precautionary program directed by a committee composed of officials from the Ministries of Agriculture and Health and headed by Undersecretary for Agriculture Kadhem Hashim Al Hashimi.

AGRICULTURE MINISTRY INITIATIVES

15. (U) Khalfan said the Ministry of Agriculture is testing for Bird Flu at farms throughout the country on a continuous basis and is spraying farms with disinfectant at no cost to farmers. He added that the Ministry of Agriculture is also conducting prevention awareness seminars for farmers.

16. (U) Khalfan added that the Ministry of Agriculture has ordered four million doses of Bird Flu vaccine to be administered to local poultry. The doses are set to arrive in February 2006. He was unfamiliar with the specifications of the vaccine and expressed concern over whether the viral specimen it utilizes is non-living or live-attenuated, which contains live viral specimens rendered too weak to reproduce. He requested any available information the USG may have on the poultry vaccine, including the advisability of its use.

17. (U) Khalfan said that only those countries certified as free of Bird Flu would be allowed to export poultry meat to Bahrain. He said the Prime Minister had issued a decree banning the importation of live birds from any country. Ministry of Agriculture officials are stationed at all major national entry points, including the Bahrain International Airport, the King Fahad Causeway and all sea ports. Any live birds intercepted are killed on the spot or returned to their country of origin. However, Khalfan acknowledged that these measures would be ineffective in stemming the entry of wild birds into Bahrain. (Note: Bahrain is in the path of autumnal migration of temperate Asian birds that may carry

Bird Flu. End Note.)

HEALTH MINISTRY PREPARATIONS

¶8. (U) Khalfan said the Ministry of Health is ramping up its facilities to be able to test humans for Bird Flu. He said the Ministry will also vaccinate bird handlers and poultry workers to protect them against a routine flu virus. He explained that workers contracting a normal flu could consequently suffer weakened immune systems, making them more susceptible to Bird Flu (H5N1). Khalfan noted that the GOB has ordered sufficient doses of Tamiflu to treat up to a third of Bahrain's population.

ADDITIONAL FUNDS ALLOCATED

¶9. (U) The English-language Gulf Daily News reported November 1 that the GOB has thus far allocated BD 448 thousand (approximately \$1.2 million) to combat Bird Flu and other animal diseases. Part of the money will go to expand the Ministry of Agriculture's animal and avian quarantine center.

The center currently has the capacity to house twenty thousand birds.

¶10. (U) Action Request: Per Khalfan's request in paragraph 6, please provide any available official USG information on currently available H5N1 vaccines for birds, including the advisability of their use.

MONROE